

Care Labelling

By Frances Lampman

Damaged fabrics have been the bugbear of consumers for years. Sometimes the colours run, the clothing shrinks or the material is ruined by heat. The cost of this damage to consumers is significant. Commercial dry cleaners and launderers also have to contend with irate customers and unnecessary expense because of fabric damage. Sometimes the fabric itself is faulty, but all too often the harm comes from improper washing, cleaning or pressing. Sometimes there are instructions for caring for a garment but often it is on a hangtag or package that is thrown away or lost.

The Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs has announced a major step to help us care for clothing and household materials. It is a system of instruction labels attached permanently to a garment or other textile article describing how to care for the article without harming it. The Canadian Government Specifications Board has developed a system of symbols to show the best methods of washing, bleaching, drying, pressing and dry cleaning. These symbols, used together, make up the care label. Words are not used, only symbols.

The system is based on five basic symbols. Each of them represents a basic care procedure. The five symbols are: a WASHTUB for washing, a TRIANGLE for bleaching; a SQUARE for drying; a HAND IRON for ironing or pressing; and a CIRCLE for dry cleaning.

Three colours are used for the symbols, the same as the traffic signal colours: RED — stop (prohibition); AMBER — caution (take care); GREEN — go (no special precautions needed). The system assumes that people will still use common sense.

The five basic symbols in the different colours may also show additional information. For example, if "100°F" is shown inside an amber washtub, this means that the article is machine washable in water at 100 degrees Fahrenheit, approximately lukewarm. If "400°F" appears within a green iron, this means the item may be ironed with a setting of 400 degrees Fahrenheit or the temperature recommended for cotton or linen. An amber square with a single horizontal line in it means that the article should be laid flat to dry. A red circle with an "X" through it means do not dry clean.

More than one symbol will often be used. For example, a label showing a red washtub with an "X" through it, and a green circle, means that the article should be dry cleaned but not washed.

The care symbols apply to the whole textile product including all components such as trim, zippers, belts, buttons and linings.

The symbols do not describe the article's wearability or performance. They refer only to colour fastness (running and staining), and dimensional stability (shrinking and stretching).

The care labelling system is voluntary. Manufacturers will not be compelled to use it. The system will be of great benefit to consumers, clothing manufacturers, launderers, dry cleaners and retailers. The more widely the new system is adopted, the greater will be the benefits. Clothing manufacturers obviously will choose to use the care labelling scheme if consumers and other beneficiaries support the program wholeheartedly.

This new labelling scheme is not going to appear overnight, but consumers should learn about the symbol system in the meantime. When the care labels begin to appear, all of us, as consumers, should make it clear to the retailers that we want garments which display the care labelling symbols.

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TO THE THAWING WIND

Come with rain, O loud Southwester!
Bring the singer, bring the nester;
Give the buried flower a dream;
Make the settled snow bank steam;
But what e'er you do tonight,
Bathe my window, make it flow,
Melt it as the ice will go;
Meet the glass and leave the sticks
Like a hermit's crucifix;
Burst into my narrow stall;
Swing the picture on the wall;
Run the rattling pages o'er;
Scatter poems on the floor;
Turn the poet out of door.

Robert Frost

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